

PERIWINKLE HOUSE

By OPIE READ

Impetuous. . . I was eating a Spanish stew out on the sidewalk, the weather being warm, when along came an agent—not a man in distress, but a regular agent—and I invested with him. I bought a ticket in the Havana lottery. . . Wait, now, you know, ever happens until it does, you know. The drawing came off two days later, and my number, 356,792, won the first prize, twenty thousand in gold.

Tyde hugged him; Drace shook his hand; and the General exclaimed his astonishment. "Well, that beats anything I ever heard in my life. It doesn't seem possible, sir."

"No, and I was somewhat taken by surprise, Uncle Howard. But there is often success in a change of occupation, and I had tried everything else. It took me a few moments to adjust myself; then I got a draft, and in a mobile received premium enough on my gold certificate to pay my debts. And now it gives me great pleasure to perform that duty. I owe you, Uncle Howard, twelve hundred and thirty dollars, all told. Aunt Tyde, I owe you five hundred. Virgil, I owe you—but we'll get at that later. Worthy and patient creditors, here we are!"

He took out a roll of bank notes, counted the amount of his indebtedness to his aunt and showered her lap with greenbacks. Then he turned to the General.

"No, Liberty, I don't want the money," protested Bethpage. "If you pay me, it will be the first time you ever returned borrowed money to me, and I don't care to have you establish a precedent that might bring disappointment in the future."

After the family bedtime, Shottle came into Drace's room and requested him to report as to what progress he had made; and Drace told him all that had occurred.

"And now let me tell you a notion of mine," said Shottle then. "If you are waiting for that old sharkbone to decay, you'll perhaps wait twenty years. Attention: I'm going on a little trip tomorrow. In two days, when I come back, I'll drive down to a convenient point; you fetch the girl, into the carriage you jump, and away we go, drive over to some place where we can catch a train, and Cincinnati before old Stepho knows which way we've gone. What do you say?"

"But—what becomes of my oath? Oh, don't think that because I daily I have forgotten it or that in one job I shall fail to keep it. If I should, in all after-life I'd have a contempt for myself."

CHAPTER XI



And Hardly Had the Northerner's Canoe Touched the Bank When From Out the Canoe Tony and Stepho Leaped Upon Him.

And hardly had the Northerner's canoe touched the bank when from out the canoe Tony and Stepho leaped upon him and bore him to the ground, dazed by a blow from an oar.

"Ha! My fine carpetbagger! You seize my wrist and keep my knife from the old General! You steal here to make love to my daughter! Ha! Who will now keep my knife from you? In a little while, now, you will be deep in the marsh, and the green mold will be on your bones. And the old fool at the big house, he die too, for my men will cut his throat. And then—"

A piercing cry from the house, and Nadine ran to them, a knife that matched Stepho's clutched in her hand.

"No—no!" she cried. "You shall not!"

Stepho looked up. "Take the girl away, Tony," he commanded. "But Nadine threatened him off with her knife. Then she turned the blade in another direction and spoke again. 'If you do not let Virgil go,' she said, 'I will kill myself—now.' Stepho knew Nadine—the wild heart of her. 'You promise never to see this

man again, and to marry Monsieur Boyce, like I wish?"

"I promise nothing—except that I will kill myself if you do not let him go."

Stepho hesitated a moment, craftily with anger. Then craft won; he would stroll up to the Bethpage station and make an end of the General and Drace that night.

"All right," he snarled. "He can go. But let him never come back here or—"

He drew the back of his knife across his own throat in a significant gesture. Then with Tony he lifted Drace into his canoe; and the young man, still dazed from the blow, feebly made his way out of the swamp.

When he had passed from sight, Nadine dropped her knife and sank to the ground sobbing. Old Stepho turned savagely upon her.

"You liar! You she-wolf! I would kill you, but I promise you to the man Boyce. An' now there come something that I tell you. In you there is not the blood of Stepho la Vitte. But you never shall know your name. You she-wolf!"

He thrust himself toward her, his fangs gleaming in his merciless mouth, but without flinching she now laughed in his face.

"Oh, you make me so thankful that I am not your child. You hang his father and would murder him! But he will be gone; and if you kill me, it makes no matter. And you think I will stay here and let the man come to marry me! I will—"

He seized her, and Tony ran in to help. She fought with the dirk, but they wrenched it from her hand, held her helpless, dragged her into her room; and she lay for a time on the floor while she heard them fastening her in her prison. It was now dark. She got up, went to the window and found that heavy bars had been nailed across it. She lighted her lamp and with a pencil began to write a note to Drace, praying in her heart that she might find some way to send it to him.

Little she slept and in the dawn she was at the window, the vines all of them gone. She heard footsteps near, and she tried to look out to discover who it might be, but she could gaze neither to the right nor the left, so closely was she mewed. She spoke, softly, louder and then there drew the darkened form of a man, Batoche, an old frog-hunter whom once before she had employed.

"I am here to borrow the muskrat-spear for the one day, for mine he was broke; but they are still asleep."

"Come closer, good Batoche, and listen to me. Take this note to Monsieur Drace, at General Bethpage's house—quick, with no one to see you, and I will give you a diamond when you come back."

"Give me the note, an' I be there soon."

She gave him the note, and he hastened away. She stood at the door, wondering why she had not heard her father stirring about. Once she thought she heard him call Tony. After a long time Tony came, and she heard them together as they went out. Then all was silent.

Sick in mind and body, Drace made his way back to Bethpage. He made himself as presentable as possible before he entered the house; fortunately, too, the attention of Tyde and the General was at that moment centered on Colonel Josh, who had stopped off to pay them a call—and who showed astonishment when asked to walk out to dinner, though he yielded with astonishing alacrity to the pressure of the General's hand upon his arm. He was busy with a helping of late mustard greens and hog's jowl, when Tyde inquired:

"And how is dear Lucy?"

"Madam," said Josh, "I am grieved to impart to you a distressful piece of news. She is soon to be married to a man named Spivan."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Colonel Josh."

"Madam, it is a calamity. Luke Spivan!"

"What's the matter with him?" the General inquired. "Isn't broke, is he?"

"General, the man has money. But do you know what his calling is? I shall enlighten you, sir. This fellow is a dealer in oysters, the—the excrement of the sea, you might say. And not only that, but he deals in crawfish as well, back-crawling crawfish, sir. I offered her my heart and my home. I told her that I would devote my life to her, and from week to week she put me off. But when this fellow Spivan asked her, I understand she accepted him at a jump, sir. And now I advise him to keep out of my way."

"Oysters and crawfish, eh?" said the General, winking at Drace.

"Those were my words, General—not only oysters but crawfish. I would not have believed it if she had not assured me with her own lips, lips that will please pardon my nearness to profanity."

Tyde's sympathy went out to old Josh, haled him; and with her eyes she begged the General to drop the subject, but it was sweeter to him than any sugar ever grained in his mill.

After dinner they were in the parlor when they saw a vagabond, equipage stop at the gate, an old carry-all drawn by a staggering horse, driven by a ragged negro. There was one passenger in the habillaments of a scarecrow, topped off with a yellow cotton hat—enough to disguise any man on earth save one, and this man was the exception.

"Tyde, what did I tell you!" cried the General. "I knew it as well as I knew my name. Now look at him!" They looked at him, went out into

the hall to meet him, Tyde in convenient tears. The visitor kissed her and shook hands with the men. "It is not necessary for me to assert that I hold no commission, civil or military," said the vagrant.

"Sit down, sir," commanded the General. And then, surveying him slowly from head to foot: "Will you please state to whether or not you regard yourself a human being?"

"General," said Tyde, "please don't scold him, for I'm sure he must be hungry."

"My dear, I shall not scold him; but I don't see anything about him that calls for congratulations."

"Liberty," said Virgil, "tomorrow we'll go over and have the parish surveyor run you off a suit of clothes."

"My dear relatives, I thank you for these little attentions; and as to your question, Uncle Howard, let me say, sir, that my claims as to being a human are somewhat vague. One of the first things I discovered about myself was my unreality. When do we eat?"

Tyde ran out and returned with a piece of frosted cake that looked like a corner broken off a marble mantelpiece. The General was laughing.

"Well, Liberty, we are always glad to see you, anyway. It is the unreality, if I may so speak, that spices our lives; and when you come with your gilded worries, you enliven us. Where have you been, anyhow?"

"I've been wherever there is," said Shottle, gesturing with his cake. "First I went to Memphis, to the races, and gave old Skinny Hughes two hundred for a sure card on the entries. Lost ten thousand. Then I followed the horses to Lexington, with my bank account leaking like a sprinkling cart. But why linger when nothing can be swifter than the approach of poverty? Finally I sold my clothes to a negro preacher and invested my all in lottery tickets. It seemed that I possessed myself of all the figures of the multiplication table, didn't see how I could possibly miss, but I did. It wasn't laid out for me to win again. He gets to a certain pinnacle of fortune, slips off, and spends the rest of his life struggling to get back. When do we eat?"

Long after bedtime Shottle came to Virgil's room.

"Virgil, you know I've got to hit on something of a permanent nature. So the question is, now that I've quit gambling, what am I going to do? If you'll not go to sleep, I'll tell you of a plan. Mark me: I have observed, along with thousands of others, that nothing digs deeper after rainy-day money than a circus and menagerie. It is known that the poor men of the South, and especially the negro, will sell his coat to buy a circus ticket. Now comes my plan, and mind you, I strive to keep it from being too sudden. Attention! You buy a circus, and I'll go along as ring-master. That is the one thing I am really fitted for. You never saw me crack a whip, did you?"

"Don't believe I ever did."

"All right, you've got something to look forward to. Yes, I'll be the ring-master, and—"

"And bet an elephant on the turn of a card," said Virgil.

"Ah, one of my own, perhaps, but not one entrusted to me. I am not an embler of elephants. I wouldn't bet a garter-snake on a sure thing. Besides, I told you I'd quit gambling—that is, I'm quitting. It isn't wise to expose my constitution to the shock of a sudden change. . . . Well, good night."

CHAPTER XII

Drace was far too disturbed in mind to sleep, and before the sun was high he walked out alone in the garden, to muse upon his situation. Slowly he paced his way along the path. Some one spoke, and he turned to face the man Batoche.

"Monsieur, a note."

Drace took the paper and hastened into the summer house.

The note was brief, but full in the expression of what had befallen Nadine, something to throb with the telling of it: "As soon as you can, my love! you must come to me to take me from the man I thought my fate, but who is the awful brute. Yesterday he called me a she-wolf and told me I am not his daughter; and when he told me, my heart was light, for then I have not within me the murderer's blood. Come not alone, Virgil, for Tony will be here, and both of them watch. I am locked a prisoner in my room, and tomorrow they take me to Memphis to make me marry Monsieur Boyce. But I fear not so long as I know you come."

Quickly Drace slipped up to his room, buckled on his pistol, found a rope, looped it with a hangman's noose and tucked it beneath his coat. Nadine was not Stepho's daughter; now he was free to act! Swift was he to answer the appeal, but he was set against her caution, the advice to bring someone with him. It was his fight alone, the execution of his oath, which was not dead like the autumn leaf, but fresh like the new leaf in the spring. He would shoot Tony, the dog, and then string up his master.

No one saw him, not even the watchful Tyde, and he hastened toward Willow Head, not having found a boat at the landing. Never had the river seemed so broad, the current so swift. At last his canoe touched in among the cane roots at the island's edge. He leaped ashore, but was cautious in the case, an Indian in stealth as he approached the house. He heard not a sound, saw no smoke issue from the

chimney. Perhaps the wolves were in wait for him, to snap him, but he was now in full view, and he ran at the top of his speed. But near the house he halted, peering about, looked in at the door of the main room, found it deserted, then walked softly around to the barred window. Nadine spoke before he recognized her, standing in the twilight of her prison.

"My heart was loud to tell me you would come, Virgil. And you brought no one with you. But of that there was no need now."

He stood in silence looking at her, his strength exerted against a bar at the window, to tear it loose, but the wrought-iron nails were too long, and he could not budge them.

"The ax, Virgil! Is it lying there?" Acting upon his suggestion, and with no caution now against making a noise, he cut the bars away and helped her through the window.

"Nadine, he said, 'my oath must now be kept.' His arms about her, he stood pressing her close, and never had he felt so strong, and surely never so determined. Her eyes half closed, her head on his arm, she did not speak. She looked as if she were at rest, and dreaming. He kissed her, and her eyes flashed wide.

"I have come to hang the monster that called you a she-wolf."

"When I have told you, yes. And now you will listen. Early I thought I heard Tony and my—I mean Stepho la Vitte, go out. But Stepho was not walking with Tony, the strong man, but was dragged out in the rocking chair; for some time in the night come the strange stroke, and Stepho was paralyzed."

"Nadine! What are you saying?" "I am saying that you must listen. Tony came to the window and told me what was happen. I ask him to let me out, but he would not, for he wants to please Stepho till the last, on account of the money that may be somewhere hid. He went for the doctor, and he came but has gone away again. For I hear him say he can do no good. The old man was out in his chair where he so often sit; and we will go see him, for it will not be for long. Let us forget all and be kind when death was come, Virgil."

"Yes, but where is Tony now?"

"I think he is looking for the money. Let us go now to the poor old man."

"You forget, Nadine."

She looked at him in wonderment. "How can we not forgive when the heart say we must, Virgil? He use me for the trap, which I will explain all to you, but he give me the chance to be with you, and for that I thank him—and for not being my sure-enough father. . . . Come with me."

Old Stepho sat in his chair asleep, but as they approached him, he opened his eyes, looked at Nadine, then at Drace.

"Monsieur was ver' strong. An' I kill you if I be not struck down like the beef. An' Tony kill you if he here, but I send him off for something. Ah, the little gel, she hate me now?"

"Monsieur," she said, "I cannot find it in my heart to hate. It is the poison. Many times you were kind, and I remember them."

He bowed his head, and through his tangled lashes looked up at Drace, fire gleaming through brushwood. But he spoke to Nadine, turning upon her a less malignant glance.

"The paralyze, it begin down here an' creep up. When it touch the heart, I was go. I say just now that Tony, he would kill the strong monsieur. He would not. He be scared when I was done."

"Your name, little gel," pursued Stepho, "was Walton—the daughter of a northern man who live in the same town with Mr. Drace's father near Cincinnati. You, an' your mother, were carried off by my men; but your mother, she fall from the horse just as we come to our camp and she die. About her neck was a purse with money and papers—one that tell where more money is buried. After the war I go back and dig up this money, but I keep it for you, for your dowry. It is here—buried under the hearthstone."

Now—now I beg you to go for Father Tahan. You know where he live. Quick, for it creep up."

"Yes, I will go, Virgil will stay to keep you company."

"Let me go with you," Drace pleading, fearful that some harm might befall her.

"No, my love! one," she gently opposed him. "You must stay here for no harm can come to me now. Stay here and be kind to him, for kindness is the will of the One above. You will, yes?"

She kissed him fondly, and the old wolf-eyes closed, that they might not see. Now she was ready to go. Virgil steadied the canoe for her and gently shoved it off. She threw him a kiss, and rounding a green cape, raised her paddle into the sunlight and flashed him adieu.

Drace returned to Stepho's chair, the old man shagging his brows at him. Then thinking of the rope still tuned tightly beneath his coat, he tore it out and threw it away. Nature, he reflected, had turned over to her his cause, and he was ready to fight. He looked quickly about, and there a few feet behind him at the edge of the cane stood Tony. Upon him the vision of Drace's countenance came, it seemed, with a startling flash. Instantly he fell back, through the cane fringes, into the bayou. Loudly he cried for help.

"Oh, monsieur," implored the old man, "please help him quick. He can swim. An' he die beto' hees ans they was forgive. He's the po' wretch, monsieur. Quick, monsieur."

Virgil threw off his coat and his pistol, and leaped into the water. A moment before, he would have shot the beast; now he would save him.

Tony was not in sight. But soon he arose, swimming, and Drace saw a knife in his hand. In the water Tony was as much at home as a beaver! He dived, and Virgil knew now that it was his aim to dart beneath him and with the knife to rip him as a skillful swimmer rips a crocodile. But in the water the strong man, young Drace, was at home, too, and turning about with a quick swirl, he waited. Tony came up; and now they came toward each other, like rival otters—grappled and struggled, treading water, shoulders up. Virgil caught Tony's left wrist, wrenched his arm limp as helpless, seized him by the throat, and left hand steel-gripped about the murderous right wrist, the knife hand.

No mercy now! Fire and wait their game! Down, gasping, down



"No Mercy Now!"

The head beneath the surface, the hand still out, striving to stab. Slowly the hand opened; the knife dropped; the hand closed—half opened, was limp. Drace turned loose his grip. The body sank.

Virgil swam ashore and came dripping out of the cane. The old man spoke: "Tony! Whar he?"

"I have drowned him."

"Monsieur was ver' strong!"

"If I had brought him to the shore, he would have sneaked a chance to murder me."

"He was the bad man, yes. He ought be dead, yes. I was to keep him bimeby. He keel the man here not long ago. Twice he go keel you, at once he snap the pistol. I set the trap for you to be stabbed in the water. Then there be no blood to tell tale. Now I am so so. Will monsieur pull me into the house?"

"No. You would reach for a pistol to shoot me. Stay where you are."

"Monsieur have still suspicion. We wait."

Virgil put on his coat, his belt, and sat down on the grass. The old man was silent, his eyes closed. He might be dead, but no matter. More than an hour dragged by, the breeze moaning in the cane. Virgil arose, and stood near the chair. Stepho opened his eyes, but was silent. Virgil sat down again and waited, the wind tugging the tops of the cane.

He heard the canes coming. Father Tahan was kindly and soft of voice. For many a despairing wretch he had held the Cross. At sight of him old Stepho's eyes were still hard. Time wears granite away, but does not mellow it. Not yet had he granted mercy, and for no pity could he hope.

"Father, this is the man I would keel. I hate him, the carpetbagger."

"It is not true," said Virgil, standing near. "I fought against the carpet-baggers in June, in New Orleans, when they were hanging a man. I cut him down."

How great can be an instant change! The old wolf-eyes dewed soft.

"Oh, monsieur, I was that man! They hang me. I hear of the brave man, but I not know it was you. Please forgive me. . . . Tek the little gel, an' I know you be kind to her. She love you. For you she would die. Monsieur, I beg you not to think so hard of me. . . . No, my little gel, you must not cry."

"I did not know you," said Drace. "A cloth was about your features. Think not of it now. Listen to the one who has come with a message of peace and forgiveness."

The priest devoted himself to his sacred offices. The wind moaned softly in the cane.

The priest spoke presently to Virgil. "She must not stay here. Take her away, and I will see that everything shall be done."

Nadine stood with Virgil's coat pulled close about her face. And into his heart she spoke: "The sun is low, Virgil. But you leave me now no more."

[THE END.]

FARMERS LEAD IN MISSOURI LEGISLATURE

JEFFERSON CITY, Dec. 26.—Fifty-three farmers and 48 lawyers will form the principal part of the members of the Fifty-second general assembly which meets here January 3, according to the official roster published by Secretary of State Charles U. Becker.

The farmers would have little trouble forming a farmers' bloc in the house of representatives because the roster shows there are an even 50 following that vocation in that branch of the legislature. Three state senators have given their vocation as farming.

There will be 30 lawyers in the house of representatives while the law profession will have 18 of the 34 members of the state senate.

In compiling the roster of state found there were 25 different professions, vocations and occupations represented in the membership of the house, varying from lawyers to butchers.

Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Kelo, who have been visiting T. J. Kelo and family of Mexico, returned home Tuesday to Cedar Falls, Wash.

BUHR-GRAM

A real, honest to goodness whole wheat flour. Recommended by physicians. Call on your grocer. WM. POLLOCK M. & E. CO. dnlw adv.

Miss Mabel and George Brannock of Kansas City, Mo., spent the Holidays with their mother, Mrs. A. L. Brannock, of Mexico.

CLUB MEETING POSTPONED. The meeting of the Ladies' Club of the Bethel Church which was announced for January 2 will be held on January 3 instead.

Mr. and Mrs. William C. Henn and son, Thomas Edison, of Mexico, visited relatives south of New Florence Sunday and Christmas.

NOTICE DOG OWNERS. I have put out poison on my Thompson farm. Better keep your dogs away from the place as I intend protecting my sheep. 45-3t. adv. WHEELER GANT.

Mrs. Zelma Woods and Junior Woods returned Tuesday to St. Louis after spending Christmas with Mrs. Callie Winterhalter.

NOTICE: The "Ladies' United Progressive Farm Club" of Cedar Grove will meet at Bethel Church Jan. 3d, at 2 P. M. for the purpose of electing officers for the coming year. All members are urged to attend.

E. L. Hogan of Moberly was in Mexico Tuesday.

W. C. Adams of St. Louis is in Mexico on business.

SUNRISE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Robert Boyle went to Columbia Saturday to spend the Holidays. Mrs. Bud Campbell is home from a pleasant visit with relatives in Kansas City.

Miss Mary Erisman spent several days last week in Columbia. Bryan Williamson gave a dance last Friday night.

Albert Williams was a business visitor in Montgomery City, Saturday. Mrs. John Coll has been real sick for the past week.

John Ervin and family were dinner guests, Sunday of Sam Cox and family. Bud Baker is home from an extended visit with his daughter and other relatives in California.

Mrs. Ab Harrison and children ate Xmas dinner with relatives in Montgomery City.

Crawford Dowell is spending the Holidays at home. A very bad accident happened at O. R. Massey's last Thursday, while they were sawing wood. When assisting to move the saw-rig up a little closer to the engine, Joe Smith had his left arm cut thru the elbow.

He was rushed to Mexico, where he received the best of medical attention. His injury is very painful and his friends and neighbors sympathize with him in his misfortune, and all hope he gets along nicely.

The members of Sunrise Farm Club gave an oyster supper at the school house Friday night.

Rice Massey arrived home from Quincy, Friday, to spend the Holidays with his parents. Miss Irene Ingles accompanied him home to be the guest of Miss Ophelia Massey.

Frank Erisman and family were guests Xmas day at a large dinner given by Mrs. Andy Erisman.

C. J. Massey of Peoria, Ill., is a guest of his nephew, O. R. Massey and family.

J. W. Himes and wife, and Mrs. Messinger all of St. Louis, spent the week-end with H. F. Douglass and family.

Will Wenger and family, and Mrs. Addie Johnson of Columbia, were guests Xmas night of Mr. and Mrs. R. S. Douglass.

The Xmas program and tree at the school house Friday afternoon was enjoyed by a crowded house. Mr. and Mrs. French Douglass entertained with a family dinner Xmas day.

J. H. Stumpf and family ate Xmas dinner with relatives in Mexico. R. S. Douglass and family help eat a fine turkey dinner Xmas day with Mr. and Mrs. Ed Wright at Auxvasse.

Mrs. Ed Carter entertained with a family dinner Xmas.

Emmett R. Johnson, of Omaha, Nebraska, visited his parents, Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Johnson, during Christmas.

Mrs. Ira Seale, of Martinsburg, was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Max Pier Tuesday.

W. C. Adams of St. Louis is in Mexico on business.

Make 1923 Count

A NEW YEAR filled with vast opportunity lies ahead. Everybody has an equal chance to realize ambitions.

Determine now to have a substantial surplus by DECEMBER 31, 1923. A Bank account regularly added to will make your dream a reality.

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MAKE 1923 COUNT

NORTH MISSOURI TRUST COMPANY

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The Buyer's Guide

The produce market is firmer, and my sales steadily increasing. I give special invitation to HOTELS, BOARDING HOUSES, and larger BUYERS to visit my store. LISTEN, as the Prices Fall.

Red River Ohio Potatoes, (per bag) (2 bushel bags)	\$1.75
Fancy Cabbage (per 100 lbs.) (less than market)	\$2.25
Fancy Country Sausage (per lb.) (the kind Mother made)	.20
Coffee, fine cup quality (per lb.) (sparkles with satisfaction)	.30
Extra fancy Hominy (pearl or flake, 6 lbs.) (without a fault)	.25
Fancy Crackers (per lb.) (fresh stock)	.15

I have a light six PAIGE AUTOMOBILE, slightly used, and a WILLIS KNIGHT that you can buy worth the money. If you have CABBAGE bought from me, call and GET THEM, as I shall not hold them for you after JANUARY 5th, 1923.

Bring me your BUTTER, EGGS, and PRODUCE. QUOTATIONS for FRIDAY, SATURDAY and MONDAY ONLY. Phone your orders. Shop early.

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